The term “solstice” is derived from the Latin words sol (sun) and sistere (to stand still), because the sun’s relative position in the sky at noon does not appear to change much during the solstice and its surrounding days. Either way the summer Solstice is the longest day of the year and cause for much celebration!

The sun is high in the sky and the trees have filled out with an abundance of leaves. The bees are buzzing around gathering pollen and nectar from the flowers and most gardens have been in long enough that the first of many small harvests are happening.

Traditionally Litha is celebrated on June 21st, but this can vary from the 20th to the 23rd, and according to old folklore calendars, Summer begins on Beltane (May 1st) and ends on Lughnassadh (August 1st), with the Summer Solstice midway between the two, marking MID-Summer.

If you look on the Wheel of the year {see the image in the banner above} Litha lies directly across from Yule, the shortest day of the calendar year, that cold and dark winter turning when days begin to lengthen and humanity looks wistfully toward warmth, sunlight and growing things.

This makes more more sense to me than suggesting that Summer begins on the day when the Sun's power begins to wane. The sun is now at it highest point, the climax of daylight, sun and fire.

Traditionally this is the time for weddings and handfastings and for communication with the spirits of Nature and the sidhe-or fae beings.
It is said that during this time the veils between the human world and the world of the fae are thin; making it a good time to create small fairy houses and shrines as well as offerings to the plant beings or deva’s. I would add that all of the places where the seasons change create a thinness as they stand in the "in-between" time of being neither here nor there...

Litha or Mid-summer celebrations traditionally are boisterous communal festivities that always had lots of dancing, singing, storytelling, and feasting by a large community bonfire, a night of magic and love. The fire here is important as many believed that the Litha fires possessed blessings of prosperity and protection for oneself and one’s clan, so it was very common for courting couples to join hands and jump over the embers of the Litha fire three times to ensure a long and happy marriage, financial prosperity and many children, as well as maidens to jump the fire to find out who their future husband would be. The fire represented fertility and lighting a fire like lighting the passions was said to be yet another fertility charm to bring on a good crop for the year.

Revelers would then take home some of the embers from the bonfire as charms against injury and bad weather in harvest time, and dead embers were also placed around fields of grain and orchards to protect the crops and ensure an abundant reaping. Lit embers from the Litha fire would be taken home and placed into the hearth for blessing and protection.

It is also a time for children and childlike play, to celebrate the ending of the waxing year and the beginning of the waning year, in preparation for the harvest to come, a time to absorb the Sun’s warming rays and of high fertility for crops, animals, and the Goddess herself heavy with child. The Sun God is celebrated as the Sun is at its peak in the sky and we celebrate His approaching fatherhood - which at first glance feels very masculine, the day is also dedicated to the pregnant Goddess Gaia.

Honey bees also have deep connections with high summer as they make the sweet honey that we will harvest at the send of the season, as they are beings of the summertime, bringing us golden nectar that is sweet medicine we can use all year long. Below are some Summer Solstice activities to inspire you!

*This was the first fascination, She hummed the song, it was as the buzzing of bees, a spinning-wheel spinning life. She spun the lives of all men; all things were spun from the wheel of Diana.*

(C. G. Leland)
**Herbal Honey Infusions:**

Honey is in my mind a sacred alchemy, a mix of sun, flowers, nectar and love making, as when the bees dance into the opening of the flowers they cover themselves in pollen that the flower dusts onto her, it is magic at it's most potent!

When we take honey as medicine it can cure seasonal allergies, cuts and burns, coughs and colds and so much more. Summer is the time of creation for this sacred ambrosia, and as such the taste reflects summer in it's distilled and pure essence. When herbs or better yet in my opinion roses are added to as an infusion to the honey the magic is expanded ten-fold!

Raw honey can be infused in two different ways, however, tempting as it may be, honey {in my opinion} should never be done by a "quick stove top" infusion, as any heat (even low heat) begins to destroy the nutritional value and properties of raw honey. The alternative, more natural method is to let your herbs steep without heat. The flavour takes a little longer to permeate the honey, sometimes up to a month, but it is well worth it for the magic that it imbues.

Raw honey infusions are easy to make and only require the sun, honey and the herb you wish to impart it's magic. Take a jar of honey and add lavender, rose petals, calendula rosemary, thyme, or another one of my favourites--chai spice! Any herb that you wish to infuse the honey with is perfect.

Infusing is easy, just take a jar of honey filled about 1/2 to 3/4 full and then stuff in your herbs leaving an inch at the top, set it out in a sunny spot and taste every few days until you have the flavour that you are looking for. If you are making a chai spice honey I recommend at least 2 tbsp's or more for a medium size jar of honey.

Once your honey is good and infused, you can strain it through a cheese cloth, or if you want leave the chai spice in. Oh and if you decide that you want to make something a little different try adding one part brandy or vodka to one part honey and you've got yourself an herbal honey elixir!
Gathering Roses in Full Bloom:

Lithia is also a perfect time to gather roses, which have a special significance this time of year because they were used to decorate the sacred groves for the mid-summers eve dancers. The wild rose especially was sacred as it represented the goddess venus and Aphrodite, both goddesses of love, motherhood, fertility and eternal life.

The rose depending on it's colour could represent the sweet maiden, as marked by a yellow or white rose, or a woman in her full sexuality as marked by the full open bloom of a darker pink or red rose.

If one is fortunate enough to have a fragrant rose, then you know the sweet ambrosia that emanates when you stuff your nose deep into one! Even if one lives in the city walking along back ally-ways or in parks small wild roses are easy to find and if one is quick and stealthy a small basket of them can be taken with offerings left quite easily. Having said that it is worth the $15 to buy some fragrant roses at the local nursery and plant them either in your year or in a planter for a small apartment deck where they actually do quite well!

Last year I was fortunate enough to be gifted several wide open roses that were so fragrant that the whole room filled up with their scent upon bringing them inside the house! I took them home and made rose honey and rose jam, both of which I use in healing ceremonies with my clients.
Harvesting Herbs by the Moon:

Most herbs are ready for harvesting at the height of mid-summer, for now is the time that they are full with all of the medicinal properties, so waiting any longer will not make them more potent as one might think, but less as they age. If you are a smart cookie, which most of you are! You will also harvest your herbs according to the moon, as this is an ancient practise that is still kept up today by many a farmer!

The best time to harvest herbs is when the moon is in the stage between the New Moon and The Full Moon-referred to as The Waxing Moon. This is a time of gaining and expanding as the moon's gravitational force is pulled away from the earth and the oceans are also pulled, causing low tides. This is the best time for harvesting as the medicines are also pulled up and into the top of the plants which enhances the plant's medicinal properties.

During the month of Lithia or summer solstice it is well worth it to wait for harvesting until the full moon. One of my favourite books comes out every year and is called Gardening and planting with the moon and goes into how working in harmony with the rhythms of the moon produces better crops, higher yields and better flavour in vegetables and herbs.
Making Fairy Houses on the Strawberry Moon:

June is the month referred to as the Strawberry moon or the "Honey Moon, as this is also the best month to pick fresh strawberries and get married!

Strawberries and honey are also some of the food that the fairies like best, so if you have the time and inclination you might make a wee home with sweet berries and honey laid out, so as to invite the fae in. I also like to make offerings of milk with rose petals and I offer them to all of my bee houses, trees and spirits that live here on the land our family shares with them.

When I first started this practise many different flowers seemed to pop up from out of nowhere most surprisingly directly in front of my outdoor shrine--where it is quite shady and I had not planted anything! It was truly a gift of support from the land.

Shrine and Altar work:

Changing your seasonal altar or outdoor shrine for the solstice is a beautiful way to make offerings and harness the creative aspect that the sun brings us in the summer.

I like to cut flowers straight out of my garden as the first offerings to the land that holds us along with some of the bees honey and whatever else inspires me--usually raspberries off our bush which the fairies adore. Have fun with it, as there really are no rules-just enjoy the sunshine and celebrate life...

Working with an outdoor shrine in a deeper way can help us to set powerful intentions as we move from season to the next, as well as give us the opportunity to gather community and celebrate the changing seasons. For this celebration yellow beeswax candles are an excellent offering to any shrine or altar, anything bronze or gold is also good in honour of the sun and the
longest day of the year.

Setting intent and planting seeds are also a great ritual to go either alone or with community. the ritual is simple, first decide on what you would like to plant, both in your own life and what kinds of seeds you wish to see grow as the season deepens...

Write your hopes and dreams on a small piece of paper and place either in a hole in your garden or in a small pot and add some good healthy soil on top followed by your seeds. As you water your tiny plants and watch them grow over the season you can also take stock of how you are also manifesting the dreams you planted under those seeds...
This is a powerful manifestation and not to be taken lightly, children also seem to flourish using this same ritual, especially those who are struggling with low self esteem...

If this is the case have them plant peppermint as it is an easy herb to be quite successful at as well as having powerful healing properties, being energizing and delicious to make into tea.

Some other ideas for setting specific intent's along with certain seeds:
**Sunflower** seeds for prosperity as not only do you get a beautiful flower, but an abundance of seeds for planting the next season.
**Chamomile** for communication, determination, creating harmony and intuition
**Echinacea** for protection, healing and health
**Roses** for attracting love, healing a broken heart, sex and passion
**Lavender** healing, purification, sleep and intuition
**Rosemary** for protection, strength, determination especially if one's intent is to quit something such as sugar, smoking etc..

**Bake a Honey Lavender Cake for the Fairies:**

This recipe is one of my all time favourites and comes form the book *Apples for Jam by Tessa Mythos*. I try to make it every spring and slice off a little offering for our outdoor shrine alongside a wee cup of milk for the fairies, but sometimes it gets made in the deep winter as a sweet reminder of seasons past....
Ingredients:

Cake Batter
150g butter
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup honey
1 2/3 cup all purpose flour
1 1/2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
1 TBs finely chopped fresh rosemary leaves and 2 tsp lavender buds.
2 eggs beaten

Buttercream Icing:
2 cups icing sugar
100g soft butter-1/2 cup or more depending..
1 tsp grated lemon zest-optional
2 TBs fresh lemon juice-optional
Or add: 1 tbsp vanilla extract

Method:

Grease and line an 8 1/2 inch spring form tin. Put the butter, brown sugar, and honey in a small saucepan and add 1 TBs of water. Heat gently, stirring once or twice until the butter melts and the sugar dissolves. Leave it to cool for 15 minutes. Preheat oven to 180C.
Sift the flour, baking power, and cinnamon into a bowl and add the rosemary.

Add the honey mixture and eggs and beat until smooth. Pour into the tin and bake for 35-40 minutes, or until skewer comes out clean when you poke it into the centre. Leave in tin to cool completely.

To make the lemon icing, sift the icing sugar into a bowl. Add the butter, lemon zest and juice and 1 TBs water and beat until smooth. You might like to add a few more drops of the lemon juice after tasting it. Spread over the top and side of the cake. The cake softens as it sits and will keep well up to a week in a cake tin. Decorate with rosemary flowers or other edible flowers.
More inspirations....

Make a bee hive honey bread, tie twigs together into a tipi shape and tie ribbons all over it for a small easy fort, make "sun tea" by adding herbs and fruits into water and setting out out in the sun all day, make a Solstice tea with Lavender buds, calendula, rose petals and hisbicus flowers, or a flower mandala, or a summery wreath to hang in your garden or on your door, make solar sun prints on fabric, or a large yellow felt sun, or a large cardboard sun with paint and sparkles, make a flower wreath for your hair, or cook a nice dinner for your friends with honey in every recipe......enjoy life, make love, bathe in the sun.

~Summer Solstice Blessings to you!~